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by hanging flags and conducting programs.

The Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce jumped in to do its part to remember September 11 and celebrate the American spirit. In a program titled "Let Freedom Reign" the Mansfield community came together yet again to support American values and reflect on that horrible day one year ago.



Staff Sgt. Josh Blakely reads the honor guard's 9-11 remembrance.

"The chamber approached me last October," said John Kunkel, executive producer. "They wanted to try something in June, but we decided to wait till the one year anniversary. This program is a vision that started last year."

The city's vision was undoubtedly one of the best in the state. With more than 2,200 school children attending two day-time performances and a crowd of more than 1,400 for the two-hour evening performance, the Renaissance Theater in downtown Mansfield looked as though it was welcoming a top Hollywood star. But the "stars" of the evening were actually local area talent that came to share themselves through song, dance and special tributes.

The 179th Airlift Wing opened the per-

formance with the honor guard's special 9-11 remembrance ceremony. Staff Sgt. Josh Blakely stood at the podium telling the story of those we remember as Tech. Sgts. Bob Pugh and Heidi

Bishop and Master Sgts. Roger Williams and Juan Obregon presented helmets, hats and briefcases to honor those lost.

"The Guard's remembrance ceremony really sets the pace for the whole show," Kunkel said.

The show went on with dancers doing patriotic numbers, singers performing American melodies and local veterans providing dialogue about those who died and those who carry on. As the co-chair of the local United Way Campaign, Lt. Col. Michael Howard, 179th Communications Squadron commander, explained the purpose of the Guard to those in the audience.

"Rest assured that freedom is protected by the best in the world," Howard said to the crowd as a C-130 roared overhead.

The second half of the program included 15 members of the 179th AW Chorus led by Col. Bill Waldron. The chorus performed a lively rendition of the service songs medley, which had people out of their seats and singing along. The choir, made up of 179th Guard and family members, has been performing in public since last November.



Col. Bill Waldron leads the 179th chorus and Renaissance audience in the services song medley.

In an email to the choir participants the next day, Waldron summed up the evening's events. "The whole thing took flight and it did so because each of you did more than sing," Waldron wrote. "You stood up there proud and tall and representing everything an American could hope to stand for."

Waldron's sentiments were met with a slew of congratulations emails and emails from the chorus members themselves about what a privilege it is to be in the choir and perform at such an event.

Staff Sgt. Sheila Pryor wrote, "It is wonderful to be part of such a memorable event. I know we are all very proud to represent the 179th in our community."



The Lexington High School Band finished the performance by playing John Phillips Sousa.